



Abby Anderton. *Rubble Music: Occupying the Ruins of Postwar Berlin, 1945-1950.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019. 194 pp. \$70.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-253-04242-2.

Reviewed by Meghan Ashley Vance (Texas A&M University)

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In *Rubble Music: Occupying the Ruins of Postwar Berlin, 1945-1950*, Abby Anderton explores the role of music in Germany's reconstruction after World War II, specifically across the four occupied zones of Berlin. Anderton defines "rubble music" as "the sound of civilian suffering after urban catastrophe" (p. 3). No longer contained in a closed venue, the echo of an orchestra, opera, or radio performance traveled through the air to anyone in earshot. It was the audible soundtrack of suffering. The air that was once the landscape for destruction during the Allied bombing campaign arose from the ashes as a place of construction. Unwanted for military requisitioning, mutilated buildings and destroyed neighborhoods became a space where Germans could navigate their grief and rebuild their lives. Zonal boundaries played a significant role in this process. Where the Soviets viewed rubble music as the "sound of reconciliation" (p. 21) and encouraged performances to restart as soon as possible, Americans heard the remnants of fascism and implemented tight restrictions. How musicians, composers, stage performers, and audiences navigated those differences and internalized rubble music is the focus of this study.

Anderton builds upon two prevalent historiographical themes within the postwar German literature. First, "rubble women" (*Trümmerfrauen*)

were the Germans, often subject to violence and poverty, left behind to clean up the devastation of war. Robert Moeller, Heide Fehrenbach, Elizabeth Heineman, Keith Lowe, and others debate their importance and influence on Germany's restoration and postwar identity formation. Anderton contends that the debris in Berlin was both a physical and psychological remnant of war for the "rubble woman"; a place where she coped with the traumatic experience of the Soviet invasion and used the destruction as an opportunity to enter professions, such as in opera houses, that were previously closed. The men of the rubble, conversely, rebuilt their careers by navigating the flawed and unstable denazification programs.

Second, the "zero hour" (*Stunde Null*) concept argues that the end of the war created a political, social, and cultural break for Germans who had lived under the yoke of Nazi power—in essence, it gave them a fresh start. The theory is debated among American and German scholars alike, including Dagmar Barnouw, Richard Bessel, Tony Judt, Jeffrey Diefendorf, and others. *Rubble Music* highlights the contradictory nature of the "zero hour." On one hand, it served as a tool for German musicians and audiences to perform their suffering as victims of the war. To be a musician during the "zero hour" implied that identity formation began with rubble, which would become a ruin

decades later. On the other, opera houses and orchestras played traditional German music to demonstrate the continuity of German identity, especially the form that existed before National Socialism. What made Berlin musicians successful over time was their ability to be flexible, first to Nazi constraints and then to divergent Allied regulations.

Rubble Music has five thematic chapters across 160 pages. Its strength is how successfully Anderton weaves together the narratives of musicians, directors, composers, and performers into examinations of the compositions being performed, the varied approaches to denazification across the occupied zones, and broader themes of German suffering. Of note is Anderton's grasp on classical music and its culture. The occupiers viewed music differently and created opposing policies. Where the French and Soviets did not ban any music, for example, the Americans limited specific compositions and the days they could be played. US forces were worried about the "political or militaristic framework associated with the Third Reich" (p. 35) and contradictorily used government control to promote democracy. Without an understanding of the symbolic and structural differences between, say, Beethoven and Wagner, Anderton would have struggled to execute her argument. She eloquently explains the musical complexity in a manner that is easy to understand and enriches the entire work in the process.

The weakness of the work, however, lies within the same complexity that makes it successful. Anderton studies Berlin during the dynamic and tense 1945-50 period. Musicians rebuilt their lives within the context of the souring American-Soviet relationship and navigated differing, and often contradictory, regulations in the four occupation zones. Those differences, and how policies changed over time, severely impacted their daily life. The monograph's focus on the individuals, often with a biographical approach, tends to blur

the political context that influenced their ability to embody a victim narrative and earn a wage at the same time. Clearer scaffolding or chronological markers could have solved this challenge.

German suffering and narratives of victimization are not new to the postwar literature. The innovation of this book is the illumination of the occupier's differing approaches to denazification and the role music played in the reconstruction process. It is through an understanding of how rubble music was created and internalized that readers can appreciate how Berliners were able to express their suffering and rebuild their lives. Anderton movingly offers readers the historical context of the rubble-turned-ruins sites of commemoration, such as a performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony at the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in Berlin or the annual performance in Dresden of Mauersberger's *Dresdner Requiem*. Rubble music was a tool for perseverance and continues to be a device of memorialization.

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